



THE MOUNTING COST OF FAMILY VIOLENCE!

Our media feeds have been flooded in recent days by the murders of a woman and of a 9-month-old baby. The climbing numbers of deaths of victims of family violence in often horrific and public forums highlight the importance of recognising family violence as a national priority. Family violence can no longer be confined to just being a 'woman's issue', a symptom of poverty, alcoholism, drug use or mental health. This is an issue that tears at the very fabric of society. ABS data shows that one in three homicide offences (30%) and sexual assaults (33%) were family and domestic violence related.

Kelly Wilkinson's and Kobi Shepherdson's family and friends will forever be impacted by the circumstances of their horrific deaths. The people and families who were at the Whispering Wall, who witnessed and attempted to offer help to Kobi Shepherdson help will also be forever haunted by what they witnessed. "It is simply not enough to continually offer words of profound sorrow" says Zita Ngor, Chief Executive Officer of Women's Legal Service (SA), "We need significant cultural change and resources to stop these murders from occurring." Women's Legal Service (SA) believes that legal systems, judiciary and police need to prioritise safety and hold perpetrators of violence accountable. For too long victims of family violence have been failed and been further traumatised by the very systems that should be offering them protection. The crucial changes that are required include:

- Greater accountability for perpetrators of family violence and sentences to reflect the seriousness of family violence and sexual offences;
- Victims to be believed and a cautious approach to be taken by legal systems that prioritises safety;
- Intensive and mandatory education and training for all sectors of the criminal and civil justice system;
- Minimisation of delays within the legal system and an integrated legal court process for dealing with family violence matters including parenting arrangements, property settlements and protection orders;
- Greater integration of services and responses between systems;
- Greater resourcing for services to provide an integrated response to 'at risk families';
- More crisis and long-term support services for victims as well as perpetrators of family violence in order to break the cycle of intergenerational family violence; and
- Better resourced education within schools and tertiary education settings on family violence and respectful relationships (Women's Legal Service (SA) is aware of young people who are 14 years old cohabiting in de-facto relationships characterised by family violence).

“Too many women and their children get turned away from the help that they need due to systemic failures” says Zita Ngor “We must do better!”

About Women’s Legal Service (SA)

Women’s Legal Service (SA) is a community legal centre and the peak legal body in South Australia providing free legal assistance and representation to women across SA. WLSSA also delivers community legal education and undertakes law reform initiatives and campaigns. Since its’ formation in 1995, the state-wide service has assisted thousands of vulnerable women each year across the state of South Australia.

The vast majority of clients who are assisted by Women’s Legal Service (SA) are victims of family violence. Statistics from current open files are:

- 85% identified as being victims/survivors of family violence;
- 100 % of perpetrators were partners or spouses; and
- 55% had police involvement due to DV/FV incidents but only 12% had intervention orders laid by police.

For more information, please contact Zita Ngor, CEO on 08 8231 8929, mobile 0438 010 598 or via email at zita@wlssa.org.au.

Contact Profile

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